

VZCZCXRO7602

RR RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLH RUEHNEH  
RUEHNP RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR  
DE RUEHNT #1523 2730623  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 300623Z SEP 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1381  
INFO ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001523

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/09/30

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: Bukharan Jews Cite Religious Tolerance in Uzbekistan

CLASSIFIED BY: Nicholas Berliner, Pol-Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Pol-Econ Chief joined members of one of Tashkent's Bukharan Jewish Synagogues on September 25 for their celebration of the beginning of the upcoming Yom Kippur holiday and their (delayed because of Ramadan) celebration of Uzbek Independence Day. Unlike other minority religious communities in Uzbekistan, these members of the Bukharan Jewish community reported that they have experienced no restrictions on their ability to practice their religion freely. In fact, they cited close cooperation and support from the GOU. Community members who spoke at the event repeatedly expressed appreciation for the freedom and relative safety they enjoy in Uzbekistan and remembered Uzbekistan's acceptance of hundreds of thousands Jews who fled Soviet Europe during the Second World War. They said that today they experience no discrimination or anti-Semitism in Tashkent or elsewhere in Uzbekistan and have very good relations with their Uzbek neighbors.

¶2. (C) The Bukharan Jews are supportive of the Karimov regime's policies toward radical Muslim groups such as Hizb-ut Tahrir (HT). When asked about this, Boris Mihailov, one of the Community leaders, said that HT was an openly anti-Semitic organization and that if its ideas were allowed to spread in Uzbekistan, the tolerance towards Jews that has characterized this society could easily be lost. Mihailov made the point that social peace in a country like Uzbekistan is fragile and that if radical groups are allowed to espouse their propaganda freely, it would be very easy to stoke ethnic tensions. He then pointed to the unguarded and unreinforced gate to the synagogue and asked, "Where else in the world today can Jews gather and worship freely with no security whatsoever?" Mihailov said that groups like HT, even if they do not engage in overt acts of terrorism, are anti-Semitic and intolerant and represent a clear threat to the safety of the Jewish community in Uzbekistan.

¶3. (U) The Bukharan Jewish community numbered over 100,000 at the time of Uzbekistan's independence eighteen years ago. Today, however, according to members of this Synagogue, their numbers are only about 15,000 due to emigration in search of economic opportunity. Nearly everyone at the celebration had family members in the U.S., Israel, Canada and elsewhere. Those who remain in Uzbekistan live in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara, all of which have active synagogues.

¶4. (C) Comment: The Bukharan Jews offer a pointed reminder that the picture of religious freedom in Uzbekistan is much more complex than first meets the eye and that, despite its designation as a Country of Particular Concern, many religious groups co-exist in this majority Muslim society with few problems - not something that can be said of many countries in the Middle East today. The GOU frequently cites the need to preserve "social harmony" as the reason for its crackdowns on groups like HT, Nur and others. Although not an excuse for the failure to adhere to basic tenets of international human rights practices, we should not blithely dismiss the notion that social peace in Uzbekistan could be a fragile artifact, and that its disappearance could easily unleash destructive forces in this multi-ethnic society.

NORLAND